Recording of bizarre elements in dreams

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Abstract: A nominal scale with 15 descriptive categories ordered in three general classes was designed. Being more complete than previous scales it captures systematically formal and content aspects of bizarreness. The data consisted of 39 REM-dream reports and 12 presleep waking fantasies (triggered by a stimulus scene) collected from 6 subjects in 12 experimental nights. The reports were rated by 4 independent judges according to the scale and for comparison according to a global (0-5) rating in bizarreness. Interrater-reliability pairwise for each category was: 61-100%. Corrected bias for low frequencies: Cohen's kappa was 0.06-0.56. Category frequencies correlated 0.82-0.86 validly with the global judgement (0-5).

Other titles: Die Erfassung bizzarer Elemente im Traum

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centage of affect words) and the grade of differentiation in the expression of emotions (percentage of different affect words). The amount of emotional utterances was greater for the dialog than for the monolog condition, and in the monolog situation the migraine patients achieved higher scores for differentiation than all other subjects.

In a second part of the study, selected pleasant and unpleasant emotions were described by means of a specially constructed semantic differential. Additionally, bodily symptoms that may accompany these emotions were rated for intensity. Analyses of the semantic differential data (ANOVAs) did not show any group differences with regard to the emotional character of the descriptions (average absolute difference of the answer from the central point of the semantic differential) and the discrimination of emotions (intraindividual similarity of the profiles). Contrary to the hypotheses, subjects with low educational level achieved higher scores or both variables than persons with better education. Also compared was the finding that the migraine patients reported a higher intensity of bodily symptoms than all other subjects, and that persons with low educational level achieved higher intensity scores than those with medium or high educational level.

The study yields no support for the alexithymia hypotheses. There was, rather, a lack of alexithymia in psychosomatic patients or in persons with poor education, and alexithymia was observed more under the monolog condition than in the dialog situation. In summary, serious doubt is cast over the existing assumptions concerning alexithymia.

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A nominal scale with 15 descriptive categories divided into three general classes was designed. Being more complete than previous scales, it captures systematically formal and content aspects of bizarreness. The data consisted of 39 REM-dream reports and 12 presleep waking fantasies (triggered by a stimulus scene) collected from 6 subjects in 12 experimental nights. The reports were rated by four independent judges according to the scale and for comparison according to a global (0–5) rating in bizarreness. Interrater reliability pairwise for each category was 61–100%. Correcting bias for low frequencies, Cohen's kappa was 0.06–0.56. Category frequencies correlated 0.82–0.86 validly with the global judgment (0–5).

Rating frequencies of each category of waking fantasies vs REM-dreams and the significance level of their difference are as follows:

- *I. Formal distortions of the dream text:* deviation of grammatical and semantic structures in units of different length. (1) Words (6% vs 8%; n.s.): Neologisms. Single words, names or numbers that appear strange, inexplicable, disfigured, used out of context. (2) Sentences (2% vs 21%; $p<.01$): Incomplete, incompre-

hensible or incoherent sentences. (3) Paragraphs (21% vs 47%; p<.01): Dream segments are incomplete, illogical, broken up, telescoped, sudden change of scene or dialog.

- *IIa. Unlikely elements in the dream plot*, which preserve the laws of physical and biological experience. (4) Setting (15% vs 49%; p<.01): Background or setting of the plot is unlikely, historical, exotic. Strange, unlikely events happen. (5) People (0% vs 33%; p<.01): A person seems to be changed, dressed up, aged, of uncertain identity, prominent or historical characters. (6) Animals, plants, inanimate objects (2% vs 21%; p<.01): Nonhuman objects appear changed or disfigured. (7) Acts and personal experiences (6% vs 47%; p<.01): Strange, forbidden, perverse, aggressive, grandiose, ridiculous, unusual acts are committed, events happen. (8) Speeches and dialogs (0% vs 10%; p<.05): Such acts are told, a spell, curse, joke is uttered. (9) Feelings, thoughts and perceptions (13% vs 23%; p<.01): Strange or inexplicable ideas, perceptions, convictions. Lucid dreams.
- *IIb. Impossible elements in the dream plot*: elements are grossly distorted against the laws of nature. (10) Vitality (0% vs 4%; n.s.): Basic distortions of being alive, length of life, aging, death, reproduction of humans or objects. (11) Activity (2% vs 5%; n.s.): Unnatural restriction or expansion (omnipotence) of freedom to act, self-determination of humans or objects. (12) Consistency (0% vs 3%; n.s.). Dissolution of the coherence or inner structure of humans or objects. (13) Demarcation (0% vs 1%; n.s.): Growing together or melting of whole objects, which keep their own appearance but loose boundaries. (14) Identity (0% vs 7%; p<.1): Identity of objects or humans is not constant over time. Metamorphoses, monsters appear.
- *III. Dissolution of all formal or content structures*: (15) Senselessness (0% vs 0%; —): The text is formally incomprehensible. The content of the dream cannot be visualized or makes no sense.

Waking fantasies were, in most categories, significantly less bizarre than REM-dreams. In waking fantasies gross distortions of reality (cat. 10–14) do not occur in mentally healthy subjects. Differences in the formal categories could not be interpreted, as the interrater reliabilities were too low. The high scoring of cat. 9 can lead to the assumption that primary-process thoughts in waking fantasies are disguised by being put into a frame of strange perceptions. In the light of these results, we discuss the continuity hypothesis. We assume that the primary process is a constant source of thoughts that are being censured by control mechanisms. The control differs very much depending on the state of consciousness and the result of a strong control during waking state is called the secondary process.